



Interview

“There is a crucial need for competent social scientists”...

Ronald Inglehart

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA

We decided to conduct our journal's first interview with **Ronald F. Inglehart** – Lowenstein Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan (USA), Academic Supervisor of the Laboratory for Comparative Social Research at National Research University Higher School of Economics (Russia) and Founding President of the World Values Survey Association. We asked him about challenges to contemporary social sciences and trends in their development. Professor **Inglehart** is interviewed by **Olga Iakimova**, the executive editor of CS&P.

O. I. Professor, what do you think are the main challenges contemporary societies will face in the near future? How can social sciences help and do they have or can provide relevant tools to cope with these challenges?

R. I. Those are big questions. I think that the two biggest problems facing the world are (1) conflict between countries and (2) poverty and rising inequality within countries.

War between countries has been occurring throughout history, but things have changed in one really important way. Once upon a time, war between countries made sense. Once upon a time, when land was the only basis of income, the only way to get rich was by seizing somebody's land and enslaving or decimating the population. Since the development of industrial society, this is no longer true. Already before World War I, the noted social scientist Norman Angell argued that

Received 20 December 2016

Accepted 17 March 2017

Published online 15 April 2017

© 2017 Ronald Inglehart

rfi@umich.edu

war is obsolete: it had become irrational and was no longer profitable, because industrialization had made it possible to get rich in much safer and more productive ways without war. This theory seemed to have been disastrously disproven by World War I and then by World War II. Actually, social scientists have done a large amount of research on this topic, and it confirms the basic idea that war is irrational: in terms of cost-benefit analysis it *is* a heavily losing proposition – in any war between two highly developed countries, the costs tend to heavily outweigh the gains. The problem is that political actors do not always act rationally – in fact, quite often they do not. For example, World War I was a catastrophe for all sides – the losses far outweighed the gains. And again, in World War II Hitler went to war thinking that seizing the land of the Soviet Union, depopulating the Slavic population, and replacing them with German peasants was the best way to make Germany prosperous and strong. It was a disastrous mistake – disastrous for Russia, disastrous for Germany, disastrous for everyone involved.

Ironically, stripped of its empire and stripped of almost half of its territory after World War II, West Germany became far more prosperous than it had ever been before, through industrial production. This illustrates the simple but crucial point that political leaders do not always make rational decisions – in fact, quite often they make irrational ones. Social scientists can help with this. Social scientists often serve as advisors to political leaders, providing feedback on public opinion, and providing analyses of potential conflicts. This particular field, “the cost-benefit ratio of war,” is something that political leaders need to absorb. A large body of research points to the conclusion that war between developed countries no longer makes sense: for advanced industrial societies, the costs of war far outweigh the gains – and this becomes increasingly true as the technology of war advances. In so far social scientists are able to convey this message to political decision-makers and to the publics of these societies, it will be enormously beneficial. Everything invested in social science throughout history will be more than repaid if it results in avoiding just one significant war.

Another big problem is that of poverty and growing income inequality. Poverty is rapidly diminishing. The world as a whole is

experiencing the most rapid economic growth in history. Almost half of the world's population, living in China, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Thailand, has been escaping subsistence-level poverty during the past 30 years.

But at the same time, practically all high-income societies are facing problems of growing income inequality. For most of the 20th century, the rise of organized labor and working-class-based political parties, elected governments that redistributed income and installed welfare-state policies. As a result, the dominant trend for most of the 20th century was a move from very high levels of inequality around 1900, toward much lower levels of inequality. This is true for the US, Great Britain, Russia, China, and most other industrialized societies. But since about 1970, this trend has reversed itself. The structure of the work forces has changed. There are no longer large numbers of industrial workers – in fact, in the US the industrial work force has fallen to less than 9 percent of the population. It is no longer the base of a winning coalition. The coalition that once pushed successfully for economic redistribution, for policies that benefited the entire population, no longer exists. This change in the structure of the work force is one factor.

Another factor is that these countries have become knowledge societies – which inherently tend to have winner-takes-all economies. In an industrial society, there are many niches. They produce very cheap automobiles, slightly more expensive ones, mid-sized vehicles, more expensive ones and luxury automobiles and they compete on cost. The market has room for scores of different products. In the knowledge society there is a huge change. The cost of reproduction becomes almost zero. In the knowledge society, it may take a big investment to produce something – Microsoft software, for example. But once you have developed it, it costs almost nothing to make and distribute additional copies, so, there is no need to buy anything but the top product and one product tends to dominate the world. If you invent Microsoft, you can be a billionaire before you reach the age of 40, like Bill Gates. If you invent Facebook, you can be a billionaire before you are 30, as did Mark Zuckerberg. Enormous rewards go to the very top. But since the top product tends to dominate the market, the rewards

go almost entirely to those at the top. This is an inherent feature of the knowledge society that only government can offset.

This problem is not yet well understood, it needs to be analyzed and explained by social scientists. Today the key basis of political polarization is between the top 1 percent and the remaining 99 percent. For the past few four decades, most people's incomes and job security have been diminishing, and this is becoming an increasingly serious problem.

Political leaders and political movements need to emerge that represent the needs of the electorate as a whole. In democracies, the masses can elect governments that represent their interests. The problem is that, so far, there is no political coalition representing the new basis of political conflict. For the past thirty years, there has been a lot of economic growth, but the rewards have gone almost entirely to the top 10 percent, mostly to the top 1 percent. As Bernie Sanders argued in his surprisingly strong electoral campaign in the 2016 US Presidential elections, the key struggle is no longer between the working class and the middle class, but between the vast majority of the work force and a tiny minority of extremely rich people at the very top. This is something that social science can aid in understanding. It reflects a structural problem inherent in the nature of knowledge societies. It would not go away if we rely on market forces, which are strongly pushing toward rising inequality. The only actor that can offset this force is government. In democracies, if the 99 percent or even a large part of the 99 percent form a coalition, it can win power and install governments that reallocate resources. The problem today is not a lack of resources – they are abundant. The problem is that they are badly allocated, going overwhelmingly to a narrow stratum at the very top. This could be reallocated in ways that could be immensely beneficial for society.

The government could develop programs to create jobs, having human beings doing useful things in early childhood education, in healthcare, environmental protection, infrastructure, research, development and in the arts and humanities. Instead of blindly following market forces, governments could be installed that would use the tremendous resources of advanced industrial society to benefit the population as a whole, to raise quality of life for the entire population.

This is a new problem. War has been around throughout history and social scientists have been trying to analyze its causes and consequences for quite a long time. This fact that income inequality has been rising sharply throughout developed industrialized societies has only recently has been recognized and we are still in the early stages of designing effective ways for the government to reallocate abundant resources for the benefit society as a whole, and not just for the one percent. There is a crucial need for competent social scientists to develop programs to do this efficiently. It seems clear that the solution is not a state-run economy. That option was tried for many decades and mountains of empirical evidence indicate that it does not work.

One major alternative would be to have governments provide grants to programs that would create jobs for humans doing valuable things. In the US, the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health have been effective in providing peer-reviewed grants for large programs that have been successful in developing the Internet, eradicating disease, furthering environmental protection and supporting basic research in many other fields. This is an agenda for future research. We need people to develop good programs that will create useful jobs that will benefit society.

O. I. How do you see the role of artificial intelligence in society – in your point of view, is it rather a threat or advantage?

R. I. It is both. Artificial intelligence is a tremendously valuable tool. I am immensely impressed by its potential. It can do wonderful things. Artificial intelligence can improve people's quality of life, can solve health problems, can make people much more efficient.

It also presents an underestimated danger. For the past thirty years, the working class of developed countries has experienced stagnant or declining real income because automation and outsourcing has displaced unskilled labour. This has been true for decades.

More recently, artificial intelligence is being used to perform the jobs of highly educated people – lawyers, doctors, educators, scientists, engineers, journalists. Their fields are being taken over by artificial intelligence. So, artificial intelligence present both a threat and a

potential. It means that we have the power to do things we could not do before. But if we continue to blindly follow market forces the income and job security of the entire work force will be squeezed. The vast majority of the population – not just the less educated – are losing their bargaining power, leaving them at the mercy of a thin stratum who control large corporations.

This is a pervasive process that has been going on for the last few decades in all industrial societies. For example, young lawyers are being replaced by computers that can read and interpret and classify the information from millions of pages of documents much more quickly than people. So, there is now considerable unemployment in the legal profession – which used to be a relatively secure and lucrative field. This is invading all fields – education, medicine, and journalism are being taken over by artificial intelligence.

There is a huge positive potential – for artificial intelligence offers huge resources. The question is, do we blindly follow market forces in which the people at the very top squeeze the work force, making enormous profits for those at the top, or do we use these resources for the benefit of society as a whole?

The political system can cope with this, but it needs intelligent and well-informed guidance. The government needs to play an active role in reallocating resources. Donald Trump has been elected President of the US with the goal of reducing taxes on the very rich, stripping back regulation of the economy and cutting government expenditures on health, education, welfare, research and development in order to increase military spending. This is exact opposite of what is needed. We need to reallocate resources for the benefit of society as a whole, and this cannot be done blindly. It will require social scientists (among others) to analyze the problems, and propose appropriate programs to solve. Some of the programs will probably work well, while others will not – but social science can help evaluate and improve the programs.

O. I. In the case when government and state play an active role in reallocating resources – how they will interact with market? What socio-economic model of society it will be?

R. I. We need a combination of government and market forces. I think market forces should guide the economy, but since the 1970s – particularly in the US and Great Britain under Reagan and Thatcher – we have had reduced government regulation, reduced reallocation, and greatly reduced tax rates on the top incomes, in the belief that this will provide prosperity for all. It has not. In fact, the real income of the working class has had declining, and in the US, it has even had declining life expectancy. The belief that maximizing the income of those at the very top would lead to strong economic growth and jobs for all did not work. We need an economy based on market forces but tempered with appropriate state regulation and reallocation.

Politics has always been a balancing act. It is possible to get too much government – it is quite clear. The totalitarian systems of Hitler and Stalin were disasters. One can get too much government, but one can also get too little government.

We are now in a phase of having too little government. This was true earlier. In the 19th century, we had too little regulation, with extreme exploitation of workers, dangerous working conditions, low wages, low benefits. One of the big advances of the 20th century was the development of working class movements, including communist movements and social democratic or labour-oriented political parties in the West that reallocated resources for the benefit of the society as a whole.

You clearly can get too little government. A basic problem is that advantages tend to be cumulative. Those who happen to be born into prosperous families usually get better pre-natal care, better nutrition, more intellectual stimulation and medical care as children, and better education and more influential social contacts as young adults – and subsequently tend to make higher incomes. Those born into poorer families tend to fall behind on all of these measures.

Without countervailing government policies, the more privileged tend to accumulate wealth and political power, which they use to further their own interests in a snowballing process. Unless the government plays a balancing role, wealth tends to accumulate while the mass of the population is exploited.

This may sound like a Marxist analysis. Obviously, Marx was wrong on many points, but the notion that there is a need for reallocation of resources strikes me as perfectly true. This is not a purely Marxist concept, of course – all societies have always had cultural norms or government policies to reallocate resources to some extent – for example, Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism all emphasize charity and the duty to give alms, and tribal societies emphasize sharing, in recognition of the fact that resources tend to be cumulative – a tendency that needs to be offset for the sake of solidarity.

O. I. Let us get back to artificial intelligence. In your opinion, how and to what extent it will participate in human's life in future?

R. I. You are thinking far ahead but it is a very important question. In the long run – but probably sooner than we think – artificial intelligence will transform society profoundly. It is developing rapidly, and it is already playing a very important role. When I want to know anything – anything in the world – I do a Google search, and it scans millions of documents and within a few seconds tells me what I want to know. When my students and I are discussing something in class, if a question comes up, someone pulls out a smartphone or an I-Pad and in a second we have the answer instead of going to the library and spending an afternoon looking through the shelves until we find the answer.

We have wonderful, almost unlimited access to information. We are smarter, we know more, and we can do more. This has many advantages – in terms of healthcare for example. Our ability to analyze and solve problems is increasing immensely. Our ability to cope with diseases is increasing. Artificial intelligence combined with nanotechnology is capable producing nanobots – tiny robots, invisible to the eye that can be injected into the blood stream. They can go to the cancer site and specifically attack only the cancer cells. They can do operations that once were complex and dangerous. They can improve the quality of life and increase life expectancy. Artificial intelligence can provide huge resources! Used intelligently, it can make us powerful, healthy and wise.

But artificial intelligence already is getting smart enough to replace lawyers and doctors, and university professors. Will humans be able stay in control? Artificial intelligence could conceivably rise to the top of the food chain. Would it treat humans any better than we now treat the other animals on this planet? Artificial intelligence is growing in power at a geometric rate, much faster than humans are developing. Artificial intelligence has, for some time, been able to beat the best human chess-players. In the not too distant future, they will be beating us in many far more complex fields than chess. Unless we take precautions, artificial intelligence could wind up ruling the world. If we are lucky, artificial intelligence may treat us as kindly as we treat cute little puppies and kittens, but I cannot guarantee it. In any case, human intelligence will be greatly surpassed. This is a serious problem. Human intelligence is capable solving it but it should not be neglected and we need to begin acting now. Your question has major long-term implications.

O. I. Reasoning about trends in social sciences, could you emphasize a particular area that will be highly significant in the near future?

R. I. Using artificial intelligence to develop models of society that enable us to experiment with social change to develop and test alternative ways of doing things could be immensely valuable. Mistakes in social and political can be enormously expensive in terms of money and human lives, as World War II and the failure of China's Great Leap Forward demonstrated.

Developing models of society that are so realistic that the models themselves can be tested and used to experiment with social change, with policies that provide a specific treatment to the society and to examine their implications, could be extremely valuable. So, I am a big fan of artificial intelligence – but at the same time I view it as something that could conceivably take over and replace humanity.

O. I. Nowadays, there is variety of conflicts in societies which is, unfortunately, only increasing. In this context, what can be the basis for social cohesion and solidarity? What will be this basis in the future?

R. I. It would be ridiculous to claim that there is a simple solution. But social science can give some general guidance. Ethnic conflicts, religious conflicts, racial conflicts, and xenophobia are huge problems. A large body of research indicates that the amount of xenophobia – and the amount of conflict between peoples – varies systematically. Xenophobia tends to be highest under conditions of extreme insecurity. For example, under conditions where just enough land to support one tribe, and another tribe comes along, it may literally be a question of one tribe or the other surviving. Under these conditions, xenophobia is realistic.

But evidence from countries containing most of the world's population, indicates that xenophobia declines systematically as people become more secure. With rising levels of security, people become less xenophobic, and they become more tolerant of people with other values, other religions, other races. Consequently, over time, the people of advanced industrial societies have become more tolerant of diversity and less violent toward others. The higher level of security, the less realistic xenophobia becomes.

With high levels of economic and physical security, people actually value cultural diversity, they go out their way to eat exotic food, travel to foreign countries, and experience what life is like there. It is interesting and stimulating. So, at the high end of spectrum diversity is actually valued and respected. In general, as more the world gets more secure, the lower the level of conflict and xenophobia is likely to be. Thus, the fact that China and India are currently experiencing 6 to 7 percent economic growth per year is a huge plus. Some observers view it as threatening that China is becoming the world's largest economic power, but it has some highly positive implications. The fact that China and India, with 40 percent of the world's population are rapidly escaping subsistence-level poverty tends to make the world a safer, more tolerant place in a long run. Nothing is inevitable, but this seems to be a strong tendency: secure people are less defensive, less xenophobic, less hostile than insecure people.

O. I. Contemporary societies have been shaped, in general, by two waves of global transformations: one is the global flow of capital,

information and risks, another – the implementation of a pluralistic paradigm of structural and value systems. But why are the trajectories of societies' development so different? What are the forces that lead the transformations and what values do populations share? Is it possible to predict some potential outcomes of current social transformations?

R. I. Globalization has brought major economic changes that are transforming the world's value systems. Large amounts of capital and technology have moved from Western countries to Asian countries, making them increasingly the world's center of manufacturing. This has brought a decline of manufacturing in Western countries and a huge boom in India, China, Indonesia, Bangladesh and other Asian countries containing half of the world's population. This is transforming their value system but they are currently moving from agrarian values to industrial values. India and China are going through the phase of rising materialism, and emphasis on economic development is the top goal. This has made Beijing and Shanghai some of the world's most polluted cities. Theoretically, in the long run, China, India and the other rapidly developing countries will begin to move on the trajectory toward rising emphasis on post materialist values that occurred in Western countries and Japan in the post-World War II era, but for now they are experiencing rising materialism.

Different regions of the world have been moving in different ways in recent decades. There has been a huge growth and rising prosperity for the populations of India, China, Bangladesh, etc. along with a stagnation and even a decline in real income for a large share of the population of high-income countries. These countries are not becoming poor – the US, and Germany, and France, and Sweden are still experiencing economic growth. But for last few decades almost all of the economic gains have gone to the top 10 percent, mainly the top 1 percent, which means that there has been cultural regression in these advanced industrial societies. They continue to move ahead in rising gender equality, rising tolerance of gays, rising emphasis on environmental protection but also with rising xenophobia.

This phenomenon is wide spread. It manifests itself in British exit from the EU and in election of Donald Trump as president in the US, and

the rise of the National Front in France. A large share of population in the US and other Western countries has experienced declining real income, and in the US even declining life expectancy. This segment of the population is angry, they do not trust their leaders, they feel that they have been going nowhere in recent decades, and they are angry.

One standard response to insecurity is to blame the problems on foreigners. Insecurity triggers a tendency to rally behind a strong leader, seeking strong in-group solidarity, and closing ranks against dangerous outsiders. This tendency is deeply rooted in the human psyche.

Today there is more than enough food to go around. But the gains in recent decades have gone almost entirely to the top. Most of the population has gone nowhere in terms of security, even in terms of health and life expectancy. They are angry and blaming it on outsiders, in a classic reaction.

In the US, we see quite an alarming trend in this direction. Though Clinton won 2.8 million more votes than Trump, Trump won the elections through a fluke of the US Electoral College. He has taken office on a platform that emphasizes xenophobia, blaming the country's troubles on immigrants and foreigners. He plans to build a huge and expensive wall to keep out Mexican criminals and rapists. He claims that if the Chinese do not shape up and accept his terms, they are going to be in big trouble. I think he will find the Chinese much more difficult to push around than he expects. This rising xenophobia in much of the world is an alarming phenomenon. It resembles the rise of fascism in the 1930s; but fortunately the insecurity driving it now is much less severe than that of the Great Depression.

Which is another reason why I think that the rising prosperity of China, India and much of the world is a very good thing. In the long run, it makes the world a safer place. Insecure people tend to be hostile, xenophobic, and ready to fight. Secure people are more tolerant of others, they behave generally better. Trump's proposals are false solutions – building a wall to keep all Mexicans out (unless they are clever enough to get ladders or dig tunnels), viewing them all as criminals, banning Muslims from the US only fans support among insecure people. It does not really solve the problem. Turning power over to a billionaire who pays no income taxes

is not the solution to their problem. What is needed a government that taxes billionaires who now pay far less than their share, and redistributes resources to create jobs.

O.I. Modern societies are marked by the fact that religious beliefs – both historical and new ones – as well as atheism, agnosticism and non-religious lifestyles are equally viable options. This raises the question of how two main principles of secularism – equal respect to all beliefs, and freedom of conscience – and its two operative modes – separation of religious institutions and state, and state neutrality towards religions – are challenged by post-secularism?

R.I. I think religion is very important. I have to confess that when I was a graduate student, I paid no attention to religion, because my mentors and I thought that religion was disappearing and that it would drop dead within a few decades.

This assumption was profoundly wrong. It reflects the 19th century version of secularization theory, proposed by some very brilliant social theorists, which held that the spread of scientific knowledge would show religion to be an outdated myth, one that would disappear with the spread of knowledge. It did not happen. My mentors and I were wrong.

One major function of religion has been to give a sense of predictability and security in a face of an uncertain and frightening, dangerous universe. Religion played a crucial role in agrarian society where people were just above the starvation level. They lived in uncertainty whether they and their children might starve next year. Religion did two things – it insisted on a certain degree of reallocation in the form of charity, alms, and public feasts sponsored by the rich, which helped ward off starvation. But even bigger function of religion was that it provided a sense of assurance that although we do not know what the future holds, it is in the hands of higher power who will provide for us. Things will work out for the best. So, instead of giving up in despair people, did their best to cope with their situation. This is tremendously positive function of religion in uncertain societies.

Economic development and the emergence of advanced social welfare networks in the decades after World War II greatly increased the existential security of the people of highly developed societies, and secularization has taken place in rich secure societies. As societies become more developed, the need for the reassurance in the face of existential uncertainty that religion provided, has diminished. Evidence from the World Value Survey demonstrates that during last forty years the role of religion has shrunk markedly. With one big exception: in ex-communist societies religion has been growing rapidly, to fill the ideological vacuum left by the disappearance of a Marxist belief system that once gave a sense of meaning and purpose to millions of people. For reassurance in the face of insecurity is not religion's only function. People need something to believe in. They need a sense of what is right, what is wrong, of where are we going and where should we go, and religion has provided this function. Marxism for quite a long time provided an alternative sense of meaning; a sense that we are building a good society, that communism is the wave of the future. For a long time, communism had true believers who believed that they were building a good and meaningful society, that they were improving the lot of people. Communism actually did improve education, healthcare, and provided jobs for almost everyone (though some of them were jobs as slave laborers). But in the long run, state-run economies societies do not work well. The people who were the party elite became a new self-serving ruling class by the 1970s and by the 1980s, belief in communism was rapidly eroding. By the 1990s, hardly anyone believed any longer in the communist myth. This opened intellectual vacuum, which is being filled now by religion, and by nationalism.

For the past three decades, the top eight countries in which religion is growing most rapidly are all former communist countries – including Russia, China, Ukraine, Belarus, other ex-communist countries. They started with very low levels of religiosity but it is growing rapidly. In China, religion has started from an almost non-existent base but is expanding rapidly. Russia also had low levels of religiosity during the Soviet era but today, Russia is a more religious country than France.

Religion did not disappear, contrary to what many enlightened people used to think. For people need a belief system. Many kinds of ideology can serve this purpose but religion is the most widespread institution that provides a sense of predictability, of right and wrong, a sense that universe is orderly.

This seems to be a basic human need. Humans evolved searching for patterns, looking for purpose, trying to predict what would happen, and those who could make a connection between a snapping twig or the fluttering of birds and the presence of predator were more likely to survive. The search for meaning is part of human make up. We need an explanation and if we do not have one people tend to be insecure and function poorly. Religion is not the only thing that can serve that function – Marxism once did so and ideologies based on ecology, gender equality, human rights are wide spread in the West. But people have a deep-rooted tendency to seek some belief system to explain what is good and what is bad and what is just and what is unjust.

The role of religion has declined dramatically in highly developed societies. It once declined almost to extinction in the Soviet Union but now is coming back. As people become more secure they have less need for an absolute believe system that lays down rules that claim to be infallible and eternally unchanging. They become open to more flexible belief systems that accept new idea like gender equality and tolerance of gays and lesbians.

Note from the interviewer:

The views presented in this interview are discussed in detail, along with supporting evidence, in Inglehart's forthcoming book *Cultural Evolution: How Human Motivations are Changing, and How this is Changing the World*. A Russian translation of this book, with a preface by Evgeny Yasin, is forthcoming from the Higher School of Economics, Moscow and St. Petersburg.